Aromatase Inhibitor Agents in Breast Cancer: Evolving Practices in Hormonal Therapy Treatment

Pamela Hallquist Viale, RN, MS, CS, ANP, OCN®

**Purpose/Objectives:** To review the role of aromatase inhibitor agents with regard to current treatment strategies with hormonal therapy for women with breast cancer.

**Data Sources:** Published articles and books.

**Data Synthesis:** Hormonal therapy is an essential component of the treatment of most women with breast cancer. Aromatase inhibitor agents are becoming an integral part of treatment for women with metastatic breast cancer and recently have become much more prominent in the treatment of women with early-stage breast cancer. The exact role of these agents in adjuvant therapy of breast cancer, either sequentially with the “gold standard” tamoxifen or for the duration of therapy, has yet to be determined.

**Conclusions:** Recent studies with aromatase inhibitor agents are intriguing and suggest an improved side-effect profile and efficacy. The approval of these agents for the adjuvant treatment of breast cancer has led to a significant change in practice.

**Implications for Nursing:** Breast cancer is an extremely common cancer in women, and oncology nurses take care of large numbers of patients with this disease. Oncology nurses need the most recent information so they can discuss aromatase inhibitor agents and therapy with their patients.

**Key Points . . .**

- Breast cancer is a very common cancer in women, and hormonal therapy is an essential part of treatment for many patients.
- Aromatase inhibitor agents are showing prominence in the treatment of women with breast cancer in the metastatic and adjuvant settings.
- Recent clinical trial results are intriguing and suggest that aromatase inhibitor agents may be useful in sequential settings with tamoxifen in the adjuvant setting, possibly helping patients who develop tamoxifen resistance.
- Therapy with aromatase inhibitor agents is expensive; further studies need to be performed to determine the exact role of aromatase inhibitor agents in early-stage breast cancer.

**Goal for CE Enrollees:**

To enhance nurses’ knowledge about the role of aromatase inhibitors in hormonal treatment for women with breast cancer.

**Objectives for CE Enrollees:**

1. Discuss the history of hormonal therapy in the treatment of breast cancer.
2. Outline the current evidence related to the use of aromatase inhibitors in the treatment of breast cancer.
3. Describe the nursing role in caring for patients undergoing hormonal therapy for breast cancer.

Pamela Hallquist Viale, RN, MS, CS, ANP, OCN®, is an oncology nurse practitioner at the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, CA, and an assistant clinical professor in the Department of Physiological Nursing in the School of Nursing at the University of California, San Francisco. She is a speaker and consultant for Amgen Inc.; Merck & Co., Inc., which manufactures Fosamax®; Novartis Pharmaceuticals, which manufactures Femara®; Ortho Biotech; and Pfizer Oncology, which manufactures Aromasin®. (Submitted July 2004. Accepted for publication September 7, 2004.) ( Mention of specific products and opinions related to those products do not indicate or imply endorsement by the Oncology Nursing Forum or the Oncology Nursing Society.)

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/05.ONF.343-353